

land. 'Criminal' clerks were withdrawn from the King's Courts by the Bishops' officers, and tried before the spiritual tribunals. In that friendly territory their fate was seldom severe. Acquittal was easy, but even condemnation only brought light penance or brief imprisonment. The inadequate punishment of crimes committed by this section of the community rendered the members of it more criminal than they would have been, if they had always suffered for their misdeeds. It must be remembered that not only those whom we should now call 'ministers of religion' enjoyed this invidious privilege, but all the monks and all the friars, and that great army of hungry clerks, employed and unemployed, whose manner of life was often so questionable.

Privileges such as these attracted great numbers into the Church, and bound all together with a corporate feeling which was a kind of patriotism. These privileges were defended and this spirit intensified by constitutional machinery parallel to that of the secular kingdom. The clergy had in Convocation a parliament of their own, where their right to grant taxes on ecclesiastical property, to present petitions and to air grievances, was never questioned. They had a set of spiritual courts, with their own officials and their own code of Canon law, as complete and independent as the secular tribunals, and with a province scarcely less wide and important.

Although this independent constitutional position, and the peculiar privileges of the clergy, were based on the theory of a separate spiritual state, the Church, however illogically, was further strengthened by the secular employments of her members. She had a numerical majority in the House of Lords, and the large proportion of clergy among the King's ministers secured her position in a most effective manner. But as a power in the land, her endowments made her still more formidable.¹ The accumulation of wealth by the Church had not yet reached its zenith. New endowments still flowed in with unceasing regularity. It had then scarcely occurred to the minds of the charitable and the public-spirited that they could find a vehicle for their beneficence in private

¹ See Ap.